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ABSTRACT

A summer school project which was designed to reorient the teachers and the curriculum to more successfully provide for individual needs was described. This project was based on the philosophy that since the migrant child's social and language patterns are different from those of the mainstream of America and since these differences were common for 85 percent of the population of the Somerton school, the school and not the child should be changed. Teachers attended graduate courses and taught in the summer program where the pupil-teacher ratio was small. The unit approach was used because it correlated language and reading programs with the content areas. Flexible grouping on the basis of reading levels and/or interests was used, and the language-experience approach was introduced to beginning readers. Training in diagnostic skills was provided the teachers; a number of tests were used. Also, an English as a Second Language program (ESL) was incorporated at all levels--kindergarten through grade 8, and special programs in home economics, shop, physical education, art, and music were also provided. (CM)

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THE SOMERTON STORY: TEACHING SPANISH SUR-NAME CHILDREN

The Somerton Story is the story of positive changes in the educational experiences of the migrant child. The migrant child's social and language patterns are different from those of the "main stream" of America. When these differences are common for 85% of your school population, then the school and not the child must change.

Early in 1967, the superintendent and the school board, in conjunction with the Office of Migrant Child, committed themselves to a policy of effectively educating all children attending the Somerton School rather than a portion of the

school population. This meant that the subtle, as well as the obvious discriminations in school policies and practices had to be ferreted out and changed. This was a monumental undertaking. Typically, the Spanish sur-named child attending Somerton School had been significantly undereducated.

Language and education are synonymous. Advancement in education is dependent on the growth of the child's ability to communicate verbally. In a school system committed to change, the responsibility for providing appropriate experiences in language and reading programs is paramount.

The basic philosophy of Somerton School is that "the teacher, as a trained professional, makes the difference in the educational process." The teacher was the key to the needed changes and innovations. Hence, an extensive teacher development program was initiated. A plan emerged to implement new programs through specialized graduate courses. These courses were offered during the summer as part of the summer school project and as night extension courses during the academic year. Initially, changes in curriculum plans were introduced in the graduate courses and implemented during the summer school project. There seemed to be several advantages to this plan of attacking Somerton's problems. First, the pupil-teacher ratio was small. Second, two teachers and an aide worked as a team. Third, the director of the summer school also taught the graduate courses. This fostered continunity between teacher education and classroom practices.

During the summer school project, each team developed a resource unit as the basis for their curriculum. The unit topics were selected on the basis of teacher interests, the interests of the children, materials available in the Resource Center and field trip possibilities. The teachers used a wide variety of materials such as: trade books, pamphlets, films, filmstrips, records, newspapers, tapes, television and textbooks in developing their resource units. In addition, the teachers schedule at least one field trip per week that would give the children direct experiences relating to their unit topic.

The unit approach was selected because it correlated language and reading programs with the content areas. This was desirable because the children's abilities in language and reading differed considerably. Typically in the fourth grade, the reading levels ranged from readiness to the 11th reader level. Linguistically there were children who could speak only Spanish, bi-lingual children and children who spoke only English. The range of experiences also varied from the child with a rich experiencial background to those who had very meager backgrounds.

To manage these divergent levels and to encourage the children to function independently, small groups were formed on the basis of levels and/or interest. These groups were flexible and as the children's needs and interests changed, so did the groupings. For those learning to speak English, a Language Experience Approach to Reading was used to bridge

the gap between content and reading, while more advanced groups were provided materials written on their level. In this way, it was felt that each child had experiences that would realistically develop his linguistic and reading abilities.

In this type of program the teacher must have certain diagnostic skills. Over the last three years the teachers have been trained to administer and interpret a variety of formal and informal tests.

As an informal measure of reading ability and as an assessment of skill development, the teachers are using Silvaroli's Classroom Reading Inventory and an inventory developed by the Somerton teachers. Other tests being used by the teachers are the Betts Visual Discrimination Test, Durrell's Letter Name Test, and the Illinois Test of Psycho-linguistic Abilities (ITPA). These measures help the teachers assess the needs and measure the progress of the individual child.

The heart of the educational program revolves around the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. English is the language of the school and the ESL program tries to teach English to the Spanish-speaking child in an effective, continuous and dignified way. Mrs. Lydia Swengel directs the ESL program for the five, six and seven year old children. This all day instructional program is carried out in an un-graded, team-teaching situation. Mrs. Leah Slaughter and Mrs. Marion Bishop direct the ESL program for the children in

grades 2 through 8. The older children, in need of additional language development, go to the Language Laboratory for an hour each day. Each of these competent teachers has also trained para-educational personnel to help them carry out their program and during the summer school project the ESL specialists demonstrated sentence patterning techniques for the classroom teachers to help them correlate the ESL program with the unit topics. In addition to the structured ESL program, the classroom teachers use such published materials, as the Peabody Language Development Kits, Harper and Row's Treasure Chest, Van Allen's Language Experiences in Reading, the Miami Linguistic Readers, Harper and Row's Linguistic Readers, and Holt, Reinhart and Winston's Sounds of Language to help extend the language program.

The so called "special classes" are truly special at Somerton. They, too, are part of the total language development. During the summer months kindergarteners as well as junior high students take home economics, shop, P.E., art and music. All of these programs are designed to expand the child's everyday experiences, develop vocabulary and help the child develop a positive view of himself. As a part of the girls P.E. program local beauticians teach the girls how to set and cut their own hair, manicure their nails, apply makeup, etc. The boys go fishing, bowling, and have body building programs as part of their P.E. program. These are only a few examples of how special classes add an addi-

tional dimension to the overall educational program.

Programs are also effected by the physical facilities. In 1967, the schools physical facilities left much to be desired. Since that time the old gym has been converted into a modern Resource Center and new, flexible buildings now house the P.E., shop, home-economic and pre-first grade programs. The older school rooms have been remodeled and painted blue, yellow and green with bright accent colors. Even the outside of the building sports a new avant garde look. No one would ever consider any of the present day buildings original or innovative; but within them new and innovative programs have been developed and are now in operation.